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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000069

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SUBJECT: Tigers say they still support ceasefire accord,
but signal their impatience with impasse in Colombo

Refs: Colombo 54, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of
Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In the wake of the recent controversy over the PM's remarks about the ceasefire accord, Tiger officials have publicly reaffirmed their support for the ceasefire and the peace process. The Tigers and pro-Tiger elements have expressed a significant degree of impatience with the cohabitation impasse in Colombo, however. In the meantime, the Tigers have been engaging in some rough behavior on-the-ground. Through their latest pronouncements, the Tigers are pretty clearly veering away from their previous "charm offensive"-mode in order to underline their exasperation with the south.
END SUMMARY.

LTTE Says It Still Supports Ceasefire

¶12. (C) High-level Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) officials have recently underscored the group's continued support for the ceasefire agreement that it signed with the Sri Lankan government in February 2002. The comments come in the wake of recent remarks by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe to the effect that President Kumaratunga should take over responsibility for the ceasefire accord as long as she controls the Defense Ministry (see Reflets). Recent comments by the Tigers on this matter include:

-- On January 12, in an interview with Reuters, Tiger political chief S.P. Thamilchelvam said the LTTE still supported the ceasefire accord, adding that "there is a resolute commitment by the Liberation Tigers organization that the Liberation Tigers will not be the ones to commence it (hostilities)." Adding that the Tigers were ready to commence negotiations with either the President or the Prime Minister, Thamilchelvam also stated, "It does not matter if it is the executive president or the legislative prime minister, it is only the power that the person holds, the mandate the person holds."

-- Echoing Thamilchelvam's comments regarding the LTTE's support for the ceasefire agreement, Tiger spokesman Daya Master was quoted on January 11 as stating that "under no circumstances" would the Tigers violate the ceasefire and go back to war.

Group Concerned re Situation in South, However

¶13. (C) While both Thamilchelvam and Daya Master expressed their support for the ceasefire accord, they also noted their concerns with the political situation in the south. Thamilchelvam, for example, emphasized that the Tamils are becoming impatient with the political impasse in the south. In semi-threatening tones, he went on to state: "It depends on the government and the military machine of the government to ensure that the Tamil people are not pushed towards such a situation to take up arms ever again." For his part, Daya Master noted that the Tigers were "closely monitoring" the situation in the south.

¶14. (C) There have been other signals of dissonance about the situation in the south emerging from Tiger and pro-Tiger elements of late. These include:

-- On January 13, the LTTE's "Peace Secretariat" website carried a report stating that the "people's organizations in the Jaffna Peninsula" had passed a resolution to observe February 4 (which is Sri Lanka's national day) as a "black day and a day of mourning." The LTTE has sponsored this type of anti-government protest on Sri Lanka's independence day in the past.

-- On January 11, the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet"

carried coverage of a leaflet issued in Jaffna stating that "war would be inevitable if Sri Lankan leaders insidiously reject the LTTE's Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal and if they consider this peace period as a time to cheat." The leaflet, issued by an organization called the "Tamil National Awareness Movement," went on to blame President Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe for the "current impasse in the peace process." It is not known who is responsible for the leaflet (the "Tamil National Awareness Movement" is not a known group), but its distribution was almost certainly approved by the LTTE given the group's high degree of influence in Jaffna District.

-- Also on January 11, the local English-medium SUNDAY LEADER newspaper carried an interview with Joseph Pararajasingham, MP for the eastern town of Batticaloa and senior vice-president of the pro-LTTE Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). Queried as to his position on the impasse between the President and the PM, Pararajasingham said "the country in general will suffer immensely" if the crisis was not resolved. Pararajasingham added that he did not see signs that hostilities would resume "in the immediate future." He noted, however, that the LTTE was committed "to counter(ing) any military attack" and that there was "a limit for tolerance, even on the part of the LTTE."

-- On January 5, senior Tiger official V. Balakumaran (he is an adviser to V. Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader), speaking at an event in Jaffna, said "our expectations of resuming peace talks with the government of Sri Lanka under a united leadership with clear authority to command Sri Lanka's security forces are fast receding." Turning to the political situation in the south, Balakumaran averred that "although the majority of Sinhala people want their politicians to unite to resolve the debilitating political crisis, the extremist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Sihala Urumaya (SU) will continue to impede progress towards reconciliation among Sinhala leaders."

-- On January 4, the pro-Tiger All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) declared at its annual convention held in the northern city of Jaffna that "the Tamil people will have to exercise their right to self determination and secede if the political impasse in Colombo were to continue," according to a posting on the "TamilNet" website.

Some Rough Behavior by the Tigers

15. (C) Although the Tigers have basically been restrained in their actions since the cohabitation impasse began in November 2003, the group has been engaging in some rough behavior on-the-ground of late. Recent Tiger actions have included:

-- On January 6, near the eastern port city of Trincomalee, two monitors from the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) were detained by armed LTTE cadres for approximately four hours. The SLMM has lodged a protest with the Tigers over the incident. SLMM spokeswoman Agnes Bragadottir told poloff on January 12 that her organization considered the LTTE's action "a truce violation." She added, however, that the SLMM had not yet issued a final ruling on the matter. On January 13, the Tigers, via a report on TamilNet, said there was "no truth" to the SLMM's charge that the monitors had been detained, and that the Tigers were "shocked and dismayed" at a SLMM statement to the media concerning the matter. In response to the Tigers' sharp statement, the SLMM has told us that it plans to continue to investigate the incident.

-- Bragadottir also told poloff that the SLMM was examining allegations that the LTTE had threatened the life of the new Sri Lanka Army commander of Jaffna, Major General Susil Chandrapala. If the charges are true, Bragadottir said, the SLMM might hold that the LTTE has violated the ceasefire.

-- On January 5, the Sri Lanka Army lodged a formal complaint with the SLMM, charging that the Tigers had erected a monument to fallen cadre within a government-controlled area located in the Jaffna Peninsula. As of January 13, the SLMM had not yet ruled on the matter and the LTTE monument remained in place.

COMMENT

16. (C) Through their latest pronouncements, the Tigers are pretty clearly veering away from the "charm offensive"-mode they have been in since the latest round of cohabitation jousting began in November 2003. They now clearly want to underline their exasperation with

the south. At the same time, in what is clearly a balancing act, they want to stress that they remain on board with the peace process. (As we reported yesterday, the LTTE has invited donors to a meeting in Kilinochchi, a city in the Tiger-controlled Vanni region in the north, next week -- we have declined.) Given the Tigers' growing impatience with the cohabitation situation, our guess is that the risks for the peace process -- while small now -- will continue to rise the longer the situation in Colombo remains unhinged. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) Minimize considered.

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